

REMARKS

Claims 1-22. No new matter is presented.

Claim Rejections

Claims 1-3 and 5-10 are rejected under 35 U.S.C § 102(e) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,617,067 to Tachihara et al. (hereinafter "Tachihara '067"); Claims 1-3, 5-10 and 21-22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C § 102(e) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,536,748 to Tachihara et al. (hereinafter "Tachihara '748"); and Claims 4 and 11-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Tachihara '748 or '067. Applicants respectfully traverse the rejections for being improperly based on references that are not prior art.

In particular, Applicants respectfully note that the instant application, which was filed on December 21, 2000, claims priority from Japanese Application Nos. 11-363479, 11-363481, and 11-363482, each of which were filed December 21, 1999. Therefore, the instant application has an effective filing date of December 21, 1999. Moreover, the Patent Office acknowledged receipt of certified copies of each priority document in the Office Action dated July 30, 2000. To perfect the claim for priority, Applicants enclose herein a verified translation of each priority document. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit the effective filing date of the instant application is December 21, 1999.

Additionally, Applicants respectfully note the effective filing date of Tachihara '067 and '748 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) is their respective U.S. filing dates, that being November 3, 2000.

Given that the effective filing date of the present application (December 21, 1999) precedes the effective filing date of Tachihara '067 and '748 (November 3, 2000), Applicants respectfully submit Tachihara '067 and '748 are not valid prior art references under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) and the rejections of the claims wherein Tachihara '067 and '748 are the primary references are inappropriate and should be withdrawn.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, reconsideration of the application, withdrawal of the outstanding rejections, allowance of Claims 1-22, and the prompt issuance of a Notice of Allowability are respectfully solicited.

Should the Examiner believe anything further is desirable in order to place this application in better condition for allowance, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

In the event this paper is not considered to be timely filed, the Applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. Any fees for such an extension, together with any additional fees that may be due with respect to this paper, may be charged to counsel's Deposit Account No. 01-2300, **referencing docket number 106145-00012.**

Respectfully submitted,
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Enclosures: Verified translation JP Priority Appln. No. 11-363479
Verified translation JP Priority Appln. No. 11-363481
Verified translation JP Priority Appln. No. 11-363482

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